

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8792

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION USUN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 4038

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PEPR, SY, LE

SUBJ: FURTHER DIALOG WITH SYRIA ON LEBANON

SUMMARY: POLOFF EXCHANGED VIEWS WITH MFA DIVISION DIRECTOR
SIAGE ON QUESTIONS OF SARKIS POSITION, CHRISITAN ATTITUDES
TOWARD SYRIA, MUTUAL REDUCTION OF ARMS AMONG MILITIAS IN-
CLUDING PALESTINIANS, U.S. EFFORTS WITH ISRAEL BASED ON
EXPECTATION SYRIA WOULD NOT AGAIN ESCALATE FIGHTING AND
POTENTIAL NEGATIVE WORLD REACTION AGAINST SYRIA IF FIGHTING
RESUMED. SIAGE SAID SYRIA UNDERSTANDS WHY SARKIS MUST
REMAIN IN OFFICE FOR NOW, HE AGREED MANY BEIRUT CHRISTIANS
MIGHT SEE ADF AS ENEMY BUT THOUGHT THIS WAS TEMPORARY.
HE SAID SYRIA SEEKS TO SUPPRESS "MANIFESTATIONS OF ARMED
FORCE" IN FIRST INSTANCE, NOT DISARMAMENT, AND FELT
PALESTINIANS ARE ALREADY COMPLYING WHILE CHRISTIANS
ARE NOT. HE ASSERTED SYRIA DID NOT WANT TO ESCALATE
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FIGHTING AND WOULD FOLLOW PRESIDENT SARKIS' ORDERS.
END SUMMARY.

1. POLOFF MET WITH RIAD SIAGE, DIRECTOR, MFA AMERICA
DIVISION, JULY 15, TO CONTINUE UNOFFICIAL, INFORMAL
DIALOG WITH SARG ON LEBANON IN BETWEEN CHARGE'S FORMAL
MEETINGS AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL. SIAGE WELCOMED OPPOR-

TUNITY TO EXCHANGE VIEWS. POLOFF STRESSED OUR PRE-CEPTION THAT SARKIS MUST REMAIN IN OFFICE. POLOFF RAISED POINTS OUTLINED BY AMBASSADOR PARKER, BEIRUT 3921, UNDERSCORING OUR CONCERN THAT A VACUUM OF LEADERSHIP COULD LEAD TO ANARCHY AND ANY ALTERNATE LEADER WOULD BE SEEN BY MOST LEBANESE, UNDER CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES, AS PAWN OF SYRIA. THIS WOULD, IN OUR VIEW, WORK AGAINST SYRIA'S AND OUR SHARED INTEREST OF REUNITING LEBANON.

2. SIAGE SAID SYRIA HAD AT TIMES BEEN FRUSTRATED BY SARKIS' LACK OF RESOLUTION. NEVERTHELESS, PRESIDENT ASSAD CALLED ON SARKIS TO REMAIN IN OFFICE. SIAGE SAID HE COULD UNDERSTAND THE LOGIC OF ANY REPLACEMENT, AT THIS TIME, BEING SEEN AS SYRIAN IMPOSED, AND AGREED THIS WOULD NOT SERVE SYRIA'S INTEREST.

3. POLOFF ASKED WHETHER SYRIA VIEWED MAJORITY OF CHRISTIANS AS BEING IN OPPOSITION TO FALANGE AND AHRAR. SAID OUR SOUNDINGS IN BEIRUT OVER TIME CONFIRMED VIEW THAT LEFT TO THEMSELVES MANY CHRISTIANS DO NOT SUPPORT FALANGE. HOWEVER, OUR ASSESSMENT IS THAT AS RESULT OF ALL-OUT ADF ATTACK ON CHRISTIAN SECTORS OF BEIRUT, EVEN OPPONENTS OF FALANGE NOW MORE ALIENATED BY ADF ACTION THAN BY FALANGE ACTIVITIES.
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4. SIAGE CAUTIONED THAT WE SHOULD NOT SEE LEBANON ONLY THROUGH PERSPECTIVE OF BEIRUT. HE AGREED THAT PERHAPS CHRISTIANS IN BEIRUT HAD, AS RESULT OF BOMBARDMENT, SEEN ADF AS MORE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM. HOWEVER, SIAGE SAID IN SYRIAN ASSESSMENT FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRISTIANS WHO SUPPORT PARTITION AND THOSE WHO OPPOSE IT WILL BE OVERRIDING CONSIDERATION. IN OTHER WORDS, NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF ADF IS TEMPORARY.

5. POLOFF SAID THAT EVEN IF THEIS WERE TRUE, CHRISTIANS, INCLUDING THOSE WHO OPPOSED FALANGE, WOULD SEE THEIR PRIMARY ENEMY AS THE PALESTINIANS AND THEY WOULD SUPPORT FALANGE AS ONLY ARMED FORCE THEY COULD RELY ON IN CRISIS. ADDED THAT ONE OF PROBLEMS ADF HAS IS THAT NO FACTION RIGHT OR LEFT IS PREPARED RIGHT NOW TO LEAVE ITS SURVIVAL COMPLETELY IN HANDS OF ADF. MUTUAL REDUCTION IN ARMS BY ALL MILITIAS INCLUDING PALESTINIANS MAY BE BEST WAY TO BRING STABILITY TO LEBANON AND ONLY SYRIA CAN IMPLEMENT THIS INsofar AS PALESTINIANS GO.

6. SIAGE SAID THAT SYRIA'S POLICY RIGHT NOW WAS TO ELIMINATE "MANIFESTATIONS OF ARMED FORCE" ON BOTH SIDES (I.E. NOT DISARMAMENT). SYRIA HAS TO GREAT EXTENT ACCOMPLISHED THIS GOAL WITH PLO. PLO IS CO-OPERATING THROUGHOUT LEBANON. PROBLEM IS THAT CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAVE NOT FOLLOWED SUIT. IF SITUATION WERE REVERSED, ADF WOULD BE STANDING AGAINST PLO RIGHT NOW. HE ADDED THAT HE DOUBTED WORLD WOULD BE SO EXERCISED ABOUT OVERWHELMING ADF REACTION IF IT HAD BEEN DIRECTED AGAINST PALESTINIANS.

7. SIAGE CONTINUED THAT SECOND STAGE, AFTER PROBLEM OF MANIFESTATION OF ARMS HAD BEEN TAKEN CARE OF WOULD BE TO REVIEW SHTOURA AGREEMENTS THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS AND
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TO SEEK NEW AGREEMENT, PROBABLY ORAL, BETWEEN ALL PARTIES FOR DEFINING PALESTINIAN PRESENCE AND STATUS OF MILITIAS. HE SAID SYRIA HAD BEEN ABOUT TO EMBARK ON THIS STAGE WHEN FALANGE ASSASSINATED TONY FRANGIA AND HOSTILITIES ESCALATED.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 4038

8. POLOFF SAID OUR ASSUMPTION IS THAT SYRIA WILL NOT ENDEAVOR THROUGH FORCE OF ARMS TO DESTROY THE MILITARY POWER OF THE FALANGE. BASED ON THIS ASSUMPTION WE HAD WEIGHED IN WITH ISRAELIS. WE HAD SECURED COMMITMENT FROM THEM THAT NO U.S. ORIGIN ARMS HAD BEEN OR WOULD BE INTRODUCED INTO LEBANON. IN ADDITION, WE HAVE BEEN ASSURED THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT INTRODUCE HEAVY WEAPONS INTO THE CONFLICT. FROM OUR RECENT CONTACTS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, WE BELIEVE THESE INTERVENTIONS ARE HAVING AN EFFECT. ONE FALANGE REPRESENTATIVE, ADMITTEDLY NOT AT HIGHEST LEVEL, HAD ASSURED US THE FALANGE WOULD NOT PROVOKE FURTHER ESCALATION IN FIGHTING. SITUATION HOWEVER REMAINS TENSE AND POSSIBILITY OF ESCALATION HIGH. REITERATED POINT THAT USG IS ACTING ON ASSUMPTION THAT SYRIA DOES NOT WANT ESCALATION OF FIGHTING AND WILL AVOID IT.

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9. SIAGE SAID USG ASSUMPTION IS CORRECT. SYRIAN REACTION IN RECENT ROUND WAS DESIGNED AS DETERRENT FOR FURTHER FIGHTING; NOW IS TIME TO REALIZE ITS EFFECT. IN ANY EVENT, SYRIA WILL NOT ACT EXCEPT UNDER PRESIDENT SARKIS' ORDERS.

10 IN FINAL COMMENT, POLOFF NOTED THAT PUBLIC OPINION IN WEST PARTICULARLY U.S. WOULD WORK AGAINST SYRIA IF LARGE SCALE FIGHTING RESUMED. PEOPLE WATCHING TV SETS IN U.S. SEE ONLY THE OVERWHELMING SYRIAN ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING BACKGROUND OF PROBLEM. WE WOULD NOT LIKE TO SEE RESPONSIBLE ROLE SYRIA HAS BEEN PLAYING IN LEBANON, THUS UNDERCUT. SIAGE TOOK NOTES AND SAID HE PLANNED CONVEY POINTS OF CONVERSATION TO HIGHER OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY, NOTING INFORMAL AND UNOFFICIAL NATURE OF THE EXCHANGE. HE SAID HE INTENDS TO EMPHASIZE HELPFUL ROLE OF USG. PELLETREAU

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